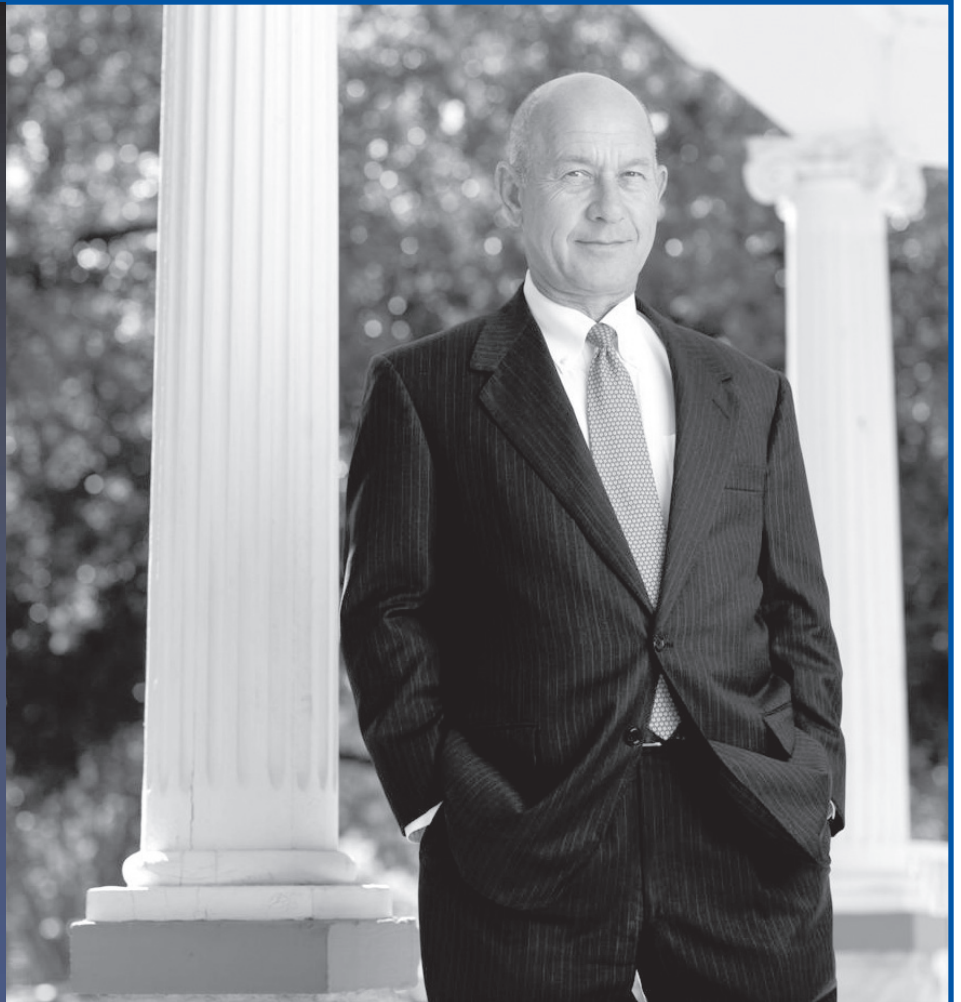


# SENATOR JOHN WHITMIRE

Senate District 15 • Fall 2012 Capitol Report



*Dear Friends and Neighbors,*

I am pleased to provide an update on some of the important issues facing the State of Texas and the residents of Senate District 15.

Due to the new redistricting maps adopted last session, some of you will no longer reside in Senate District 15 and some of you will be new or return residents to the district. Regardless, I hope to give you some insight on what is happening in the district and in Austin and what you can expect next legislative session.

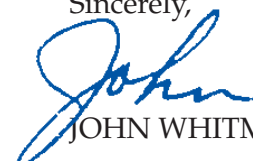
During the interim, House and Senate Committees are holding public hearings on a variety of topics to be considered by the 83rd Legislature which convenes in January 2013.

As Chair of the Senate Criminal Justice Committee, I am continuing my efforts to bring needed reforms to the adult and juvenile criminal justice systems. I also serve as a member of the Senate Administration Committee, Business and Commerce Committee, Finance Committee, and Government Organization Committee. In addition to the interim committee work, I am a member of the Texas Sunset Commission which is currently reviewing several critical state agencies.

As the longest serving member in the Texas Senate, I serve as Dean of the Senate. I take my seniority and role as Dean very seriously and will continue to use my position to help bring the Senate together and foster compromise during times of intense debate and negotiations.

It has been my privilege to represent Senate District 15 for the past 29 years and I am honored to continue to work on your behalf in Austin and in our community.

Sincerely,

  
JOHN WHITMIRE

# IN OUR COMMUNITY

## ELECTION DAY 2012

One of the most fundamental rights in a democracy is the right to vote. Offices up for election on November 6, 2012 include President of the United States, all U.S. Congressmen, and all State Senators and State Representatives.

Register to vote by requesting an application from the Harris County Tax Office by calling 713-274-VOTE (8683) or by stopping by any of the 15 Harris County area tax offices or any public library. Applications can be downloaded from Harris County at [www.hctax.net/voter/acquirevoterapp.aspx](http://www.hctax.net/voter/acquirevoterapp.aspx).

Voters can cast their vote prior to election day at several early voting locations. If you wait until election day, you must vote at your precinct voting poll location. Precincts are listed on your voter registration card or you can find early voting locations and precinct polling information by contacting the Harris County Clerk's Office at 713-755-6965 or [www.harrisvotes.com](http://www.harrisvotes.com).



Senator Whitmire and Mayor Parker help promote Kids Vision for Life to provide eyeglasses to HISD students.

## HELPING KIDS SUCCEED

Imagine going to school to learn and not being able to keep up in class simply because you have poor vision, but lack the resources for eyeglasses.

Studies show that one in four children has a vision problem and of those, 90 percent do not have eyeglasses. Children who cannot see in class are more likely to have trouble in school which can lead to behavioral problems and dropping out. Studies also show that three out of four juvenile offenders have undetected or uncorrected vision problems.

Senator Whitmire was pleased to help promote a collaboration between Houston Independent School District, the City of Houston, and Kids Vision for Life to provide free fittings and eyeglasses to thousands of students in Houston.

"Kids Vision for Life is making a difference in the lives of thousands of our children who want to go to school and learn, but simply cannot see the chalkboard or their books because of vision problems," commented Whitmire. "I am proud to help promote such a worthwhile endeavor."

## Important Election Dates

**October 9, 2012**

Last Day to Register to Vote

**October 22 - November 2, 2012**

Early Voting

**November 6, 2012**

General Election

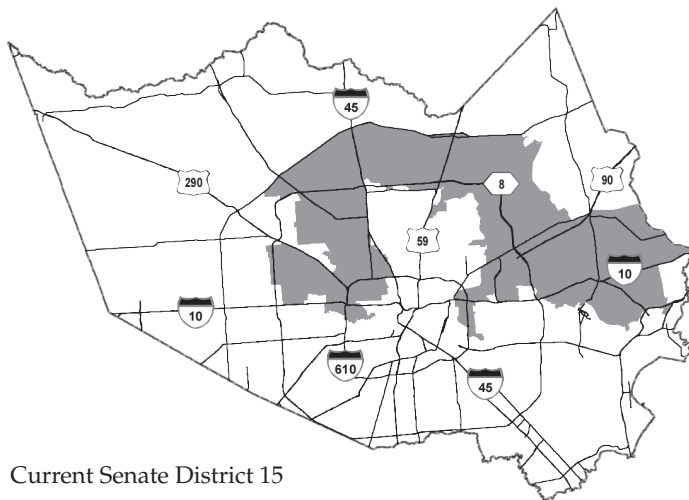
## REDISTRICTING

Following the 2010 census count, new congressional, legislative and State Board of Education districts were drawn by the Legislature and, in some cases, the federal courts. Citizens will vote in these new districts this year and your representation will be based on these new districts effective January 2013.

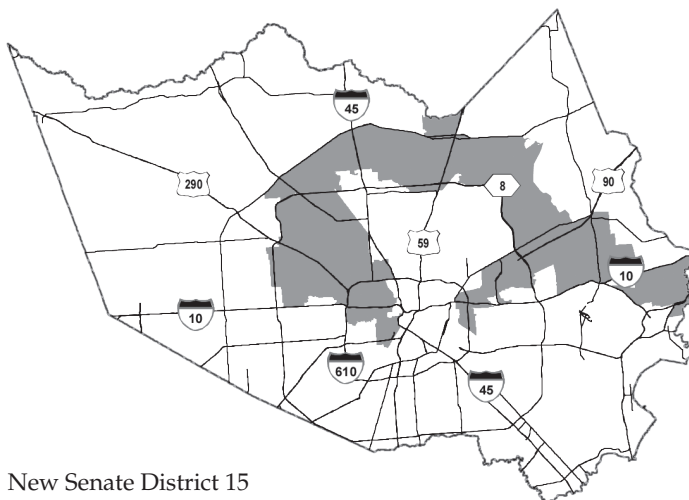
Given our dramatic population growth, Texas gained four congressional seats and Texas Senate districts increased in population by almost 140,000 people. Below are outlines of the old and new Senate District 15 boundaries.

To find out who currently represents you in Congress and the Texas Legislature and which district you will be in for the 2012 elections, go to [www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us](http://www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us) and enter your address.

"I am honored to have represented Senate District 15 for almost 30 years and while I am always disappointed to lose portions of my district, I am pleased that the Heights were united and Montrose was included in the district," Whitmire stated.



Current Senate District 15



New Senate District 15



# CRIMINAL JUSTICE & PUBLIC SAFETY

As Chairman of the Senate Criminal Justice Committee, Senator Whitmire is committed to making improvements to our criminal justice system while enhancing public safety.

Texas remains tough on repeat and violent offenders, and Senator Whitmire and state leaders insist that Texas will always have adequate space for murderers, rapists and child molesters. But by also being smart, Texas is saving money by providing alternatives for low-level offenders, breaking the cycle of crime and addiction, and saving lives, victims and families. During all of these reforms, this is the second consecutive year the major crime rate in Texas has dropped significantly.

"Through our efforts, Texas has become the model for other states to follow on how to reform adult criminal justice systems and we are continuing to make strides in the juvenile justice system as well," stated Chairman Whitmire. "Most importantly, none of these reforms have been passed without public safety being the highest priority."



*Senator Whitmire, Senator Patrick and Governor Perry visit the Seminary Program at the Darrington Prison.*

## MODEL FOR THE NATION

Over the past several sessions, Senator Whitmire has led the charge to adopt much needed reforms to Texas' adult criminal justice system. Due to those reforms, Texas has been able to end its perpetual prison building mode and actually closed a prison unit in Sugarland for the first time in history.

By focusing on treatment and rehabilitation, Texas can successfully deter some people from entering the system, assist those who are in the system with their addictions and mental health issues, and help people coming out of prison lead more productive lives on the outside.

Senator Whitmire has been successful in protecting the reforms from budget cuts the past few sessions and will continue this fight in the upcoming session. To cut funding would only serve to increase recidivism, increase incarceration costs and return Texas to the days of prison expansion.

"More and more often, other states and reform groups ask me to speak about the successes in Texas' criminal justice system," Whitmire said. "This is one part of our state government that I am proud to say is a model for the rest of the country."

## YOUTH REFORMS CONTINUE

Working with his colleagues and local probation departments, Senator Whitmire has led the charge to commit resources to local probation departments so that youth can be kept in the community. The results not only save money, but provide for a much better outcome for the youthful offender when they are placed near their families and near the services and care they need to turn their lives around.

Last session, Senator Whitmire was successful in completing a merger of the Texas Youth Commission and the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission. The new Texas Juvenile Justice Department will be able to better coordinate services for our youth offenders with the goal of keeping more kids in the community while providing a secure state run system for our more violent offenders.

Due to the reforms, Texas has been able to close eight youth facilities and has lowered the population in institutions, halfway houses, and contracted care from 4,700 down to 1,500.

"Whether in a local probation facility or a state-run facility, the goal is to provide youth with the education, mental health services, and treatment they need to help break the cycle of crime, addiction, and violence," commented Chairman Whitmire. "I am committed to finding the resources to keep more kids in the community while ensuring that the state facilities are operating securely and providing quality services."

## SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Often referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline, Senator Whitmire has increased his focus on public school discipline. Across Texas, school districts are hiring police departments, issuing tickets, requiring families to go to court, and creating the first encounter with our justice system for our students. Too often, those students are cited for behavior that while disruptive to the classroom are not grounds for citation, expulsion, or a criminal record.

Senator Whitmire was successful in passing legislation to ensure that kids under twelve will no longer receive criminal charges for truancy. Children over twelve can receive a Class C misdemeanor for truancy. If conditions are met, the case will be expunged with no criminal record.

Numerous occurrences across the state show kids being ticketed for wearing too much perfume, being out of line in the hall, or talking too loudly in class. Not too long ago, such behavior would have resulted in a kid being sent to the back of the classroom or the principal's office.

"We have to distinguish who we are afraid of and who we are mad at," commented Senator Whitmire. "If teachers and school administrators are afraid of a student, they need the tools to remove that child from the classroom. If they are simply mad at a child for their behavior, we must have alternatives to that child ending up in the justice system."

# SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES AHEAD

## BALANCING THE BUDGET

Balancing the state budget is always a difficult task, but it was especially painful last session. The budget approved by the Legislature not only cut over \$15 billion from current services, it also pushed off funding for \$4 billion in Medicaid costs to the next budget, did not cover school enrollment growth for the first time in history, and delayed \$2 billion in funding to the foundation school program.

“As a member of the Texas Legislature for almost 40 years, this is one of the first times I have voted against the state budget,” commented Senator Whitmire. “I could not in good conscience vote for a budget that left so many crucial programs underfunded and pushed off funding for critical programs like public education and Medicaid.”

Even though the economy continues to improve and state revenues are ahead of projections, the upcoming budget process will again be difficult. The Legislature must pay for what was left unfunded last session and address a growing state population and increased demand for state services.

“While the Texas economy is improving and we continue to outpace the nation, we can still do better for our schools, highways, health and human services, universities, state parks and other crucial government services,” stated Whitmire. “Texans deserve better.”

## EDUCATING OUR CHILDREN

Not only did the Legislature delay \$2 billion in funding for the Foundation School Program, the primary source of funding for school districts, the current budget also cut \$4 billion in funding to our public education system.

As a result of the cuts, school districts are shutting campuses, teachers are losing their jobs, and classrooms are getting larger.

Another result of the cuts and potentially the only way the Legislature is going to respond to the school funding crisis is that five separate lawsuits have been filed on behalf of over 500 school districts and 3 million school children. The lawsuits contend that the state has failed to provide adequate resources to meet academic standards, school districts lack meaningful discretion to set their own tax rate, and school finance system is inequitable and arbitrary.



*Senator Whitmire visits students attending Kipp Houston and ties a shoe along the way.*

In addition to deciding how to allocate school funding across the state, legislators continue to struggle with the best method of funding our schools. Property taxes are still pricing people out of their homes, the business tax still has a structural deficit, and sales tax cannot sustain the growth in population.

“Providing a quality education to our children should be a top priority in this state,” demanded Whitmire. “Our children deserve top notch schools, highly paid and trained teachers, and the best education available. Nothing less should be accepted.”



*Senator Whitmire and members of the Senate Democratic Caucus address the media in the Senate Chamber.*

## SUNSET REVIEWS & THE PORT OF HOUSTON AUTHORITY

Created in 1977, the Texas Sunset Commission is charged with identifying and eliminating waste, duplication, and inefficiency in state government. Based on the work of the Sunset staff and the input received from the agencies and the public, legislation will be considered next session on whether to abolish the agencies or continue them with recommended changes.

As a member of the Sunset Commission, Senator Whitmire and his colleagues are currently holding hearings on 24 agencies including: Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Education Agency, Ethics Commission, Facilities Commission, Higher Education Coordinating Board, Department of Information Resources, Lottery Commission, Board of Pardons and Paroles, Pension Review Board, and the Railroad Commission.

In addition to these state agencies, Senator Whitmire was successful in placing the Port of Houston Authority under sunset review requiring the Port to go through the same review that all state agencies must go through.

“The Sunset process is one of the most thorough reviews of state government,” Whitmire stated. “With the ongoing concerns about the operations at the Port, I am confident the staff of the Sunset Commission will make recommendations to improve transparency and efficiency at the Port and I look forward to seeing that those recommendations are carried out.”



# PREPARING FOR THE 83RD LEGISLATIVE SESSION

While the regular legislative session lasts for only 140 days every two years, Senator Whitmire and his colleagues serve on committees that continue to work during the interim to receive input from the public and discuss upcoming issues of importance. Each committee will present a report to the 83rd Legislature including its findings and recommendations. The following is a list of some of the key interim charges being studied by the Texas Senate.



## Business and Commerce

- Study workforce training programs and whether they meet business and worker needs
- Review the Texas homeowners' insurance market
- Analyze telecommunications market in Texas



## Criminal Justice

- Study the long-term stability of the Crime Victims Compensation Fund
- Assess trends in prescription drug abuse
- Conduct a comprehensive review of school discipline practices
- Study the use of administrative segregation in prisons
- Evaluate diversion and treatment programs



## Education

- Evaluate public school management practices
- Review educator and principal preparation programs
- Examine the performance and accountability of charter schools
- Study school choice programs in other states



## Finance

- Review the state's spending limits
- Make recommendations to improve efficiency and transparency of budget process
- Review funding sources for training and retention of law enforcement officers
- Study methods of financing capital projects at higher education institutions



## Health and Human Services

- Monitor impact of federal health care reform
- Evaluate implementation of cost-containment strategies
- Review state's investment in health care innovation
- Study management structure and supervision of CPS caseworkers
- Review state's public mental health system to improve access and efficiencies



## Higher Education

- Study more cost effective funding of financial aid programs
- Review academic and non-academic barriers to non-traditional students
- Examine the transfer system between junior colleges and universities



## Natural Resources

- Monitor effects of EPA rules and make recommendations to reduce regulatory burden
- Study the impediments to implementation of the State Water Plan
- Make recommendations on the management of groundwater resources
- Review the Texas Emissions Reduction Program



## State Affairs

- Review Texas Workers' Compensation System
- Study the actions Texas can take to protect citizens from federal overreach
- Examine the impact of allowing the purchasing of health insurance across state lines
- Consider establishing a workforce retention program for DPS officers



## Transportation & Homeland Security

- Examine impact of border violence and illegal trafficking on Texas economy
- Evaluate the impacts of the Panama Canal expansion on Texas
- Review best practices for traffic-flow management
- Study the potential for toll collection and enforcement tools against toll evaders
- Analyze planning processes for Metropolitan Planning Organizations



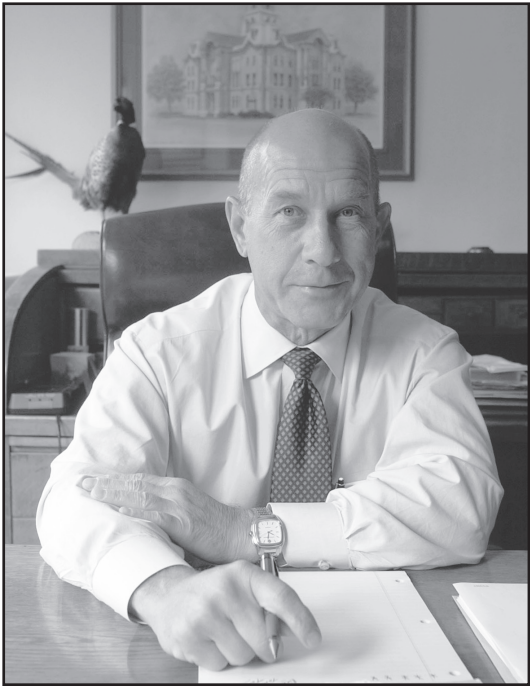
*Senator Whitmire debates legislation on the Senate floor.*



Senator John Whitmire

Dean of the Texas Senate  
P.O. Box 12068 Austin, Texas 78711

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SENATOR JOHN WHITMIRE  
SENATE DISTRICT 15  
FALL 2012 CAPITOL REPORT

Capitol Office

P.O. Box 12068  
Austin, Texas 78711  
(512) 463-0115  
FAX: (512) 475-3737



District Office

803 Yale Street  
Houston, Texas 77007  
(713) 864-8701  
FAX: (713) 864-5287

Dial 711 for Relay Calls  
Email: [john.whitmire@senate.state.tx.us](mailto:john.whitmire@senate.state.tx.us)

THE TEXAS SENATE IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER AND DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE ON THE BASIS OF RACE, COLOR, NATIONAL ORIGIN, SEX, RELIGION, AGE OR DISABILITY IN EMPLOYMENT OR THE PROVISION OF SERVICES.

# HELPFUL TOLL FREE NUMBERS

Abuse Hotline (children, elderly, disabled) 1-800-252-5400  
Children's Health Insurance (CHIP) ... 1-800-647-6558  
Child Support Enforcement ..... 1-800-252-8014  
Consumer Protection ..... 1-800-621-0508  
Consumer Credit Helpline ..... 1-800-538-1579  
Crime Victims Compensation ..... 1-800-983-9933  
Crime Stoppers ..... 1-800-252-8477  
Emergency Roadside Assistance ..... 1-800-525-5555  
Environmental Complaints ..... 1-888-777-3186

Governor's Constituent Comm ..... 1-800-843-5789  
Insurance Information and Assistance. 1-800-252-3439  
Legal Referral ..... 1-800-252-9690  
Medicaid Hotline ..... 1-800-252-8263  
Runaway Hotline ..... 1-888-580-4357  
Student Financial Aid ..... 1-877-782-7322  
Comptroller's Taxpayer Assistance ..... 1-800-252-5555  
Voter Registration/Elections ..... 1-800-252-8683  
Youth Hotline ..... 1-800-210-2278